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AUTHOR Huebsch, Winnie R.
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ABSTRACT

Since 1987, the school district of West Allis-West Milwaukee (Wisconsin) has reviewed and revised its elementary reading program based on the philosophy that spoken, read, and written language must flow naturally from the child, be used in meaningful ways to communicate real needs, and involve tradebooks. Numerous inservice presentations and meetings generated a rich flow of dialogue that has eased much of the discomfort which attends any major educational change. The basal reader has become but one component of a varied literature program. Increasingly, reading instruction has moved towards "whole-class" instruction. Trade books were chosen by a committee (with input from many staff members) and gradually introduced into the curriculum. Distribution and financial constraints remain the greatest challenges to the success of the tradebook program. Mandated district testing needs to become more consistent with the principles of whole language, literature-based instruction if it is to reflect appropriately the reading/language arts growth of the students in the district. (A list of the tradebooks used in the district and the tradebook evaluation guide are attached.) (RS)

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UTILIZING TRADEBOOKS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: CONSIDERATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CHANGE

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Winnie R. Huebsch, Ph.D.
School District of West Allis-West Milwaukee, et al.
West Allis, Wisconsin 53227

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Paper presented at the International Reading Association Thirty-sixth Annual Convention. Las Vegas, Nevada, May 6-10, 1991.

Over the past four years, the School District of West Allis-West Milwaukee, et al. has reviewed and revised its elementary reading program. Much of the revision has been based on the philosophy that spoken, read and written language must flow naturally from the child and be used in meaningful ways to communicate real needs. Current research maintains that the effective use of children's literature can promote and enhance meaningful literary transactions. (Cullinan, 1987; Routman, 1988; Keegan and Shrake, 1991.) Given recent research perspectives, the current movement toward "holistic" reading/writing instruction and district goals, a redefining of reading instruction became imperative. This paper will address the movement toward meaningful reading instruction through the use of tradebooks. It will address the issues of staff development, current basal adoptions, classroom organization, tradebook selection and use, and considerations and problems encountered by the district as it redefines its reading and language arts curriculum.

Staff Development

Change comes slowly. For many teachers, it can be an "unnerving" experience. Change occurs step-by-step: we "ease" into new methodologies and philosophies of instruction. Given this reality, the School District of West Allis-West Milwaukee, et al. made, and continues to make, a concerted effort to inform and instruct its elementary staff on current reading and writing research and instruction. Six to eight half-day in-service presentations are given yearly to groups of elementary teachers (30 per session). Three individual building in-service presentations are provided, which focus on reading/language arts concerns specific to that building, by the elementary reading and language arts specialist yearly. A quarterly newsletter informs staff of the newest reading/writing methodologies and strategy instruction. Teachers meet yearly at "grade-level share meetings" to discuss individual grade level problems and concerns. After-school presentations are provided to two representatives of each building (26 total), who act as "reading-lead" teachers, facilitators and contact personnel for the reading/language arts department. The rich flow of dialogue has eased much of the discomfort which attends any major educational change. Over the past four years, in-service presentations have addressed the following issues/concerns:

- whole language philosophy and perspectives
- implementation of whole language techniques at separate grade levels
- modifying the basal reading program to include children's literature
- the selection of quality children's literature
- content area reading strategies
- cooperative learning techniques
- learning and reading styles research and instructional methods

In addition to district in-service presentations, "model" lessons demonstrating the latest reading strategy instruction are provided by the reading and language arts specialist. Therefore, in addition to hearing of the newest strategies, classroom teachers see the techniques taught to their students. On-going staff development has been the most crucial and essential element in the transition to an effective literature-based reading program.

The Use of Basal Readers

Currently, the West Allis-West Milwaukee district employs a co-basal reading program. Where formerly the basal reader was the sole component of the reading program and rather rigidly adhered to, there is now a progressive and determined "release" from more traditional basal reading instruction. The infusion of multiple copies of selected tradebooks at each grade level has given teachers the opportunity to use the basal as it was designed to be used, as a tool. Because of the diversified tradebook selections, the elementary staff selectively chooses various stories and poems from the adopted basal series. Workbook pages are used selectively as well. Individual tradebooks, which are used for a period of 3 weeks per title, have become a vital component of the elementary reading program.

The increase in the amount of variety and accessibility of quality literature, and the intense interest in the tradebooks on the part of the children, have resulted in a new enthusiasm for reading instruction on the part of the staff. Most elementary teachers are utilizing strategies such as semantic mapping, story mapping, guided questioning which focuses on inference, and cooperative grouping or paired reading techniques. The basal reader is now but one component to the varied literature program offered by the school district.

Classroom Organization

Most classrooms within the district are self-contained. Increasingly, reading instruction is moving toward "whole-class" instruction, with skills and strategy lessons provided to small "skill" groups as needed. Flexible grouping is encouraged. The tradebooks are read and discussed by the entire class. Assignments then differ according to the ability levels of the students. All children are encouraged to be placed at their instructional reading levels within the basal and tradebook programs to minimize frustration and promote success in reading. Cross-grade "shared reading" is encouraged to give older, weaker readers an opportunity for success through working with younger students. Although each classroom has a variety of reading abilities, instruction focuses on comprehension strategies at all levels, and paired reading experiences are promoted. Cooperative learning experiences are now provided in many classrooms.

Tradebook Selection and Use

Due to the great expense required for starting a literature-based program, the tradebook "component" to elementary reading instruction was introduced gradually, with two - three titles added per year, over the course of the past four years. An 18 member tradebook committee reviewed noteable children's books and proposed the adoption of the choices listed at the end of this paper. The change to "literature" was necessarily gradual, and a release from reliance upon the basal reader became natural for the elementary staff. This year and last, surveys were sent to elementary teachers asking for their comments on the success of individual selections and their

suggestions for tradebook additions. Limited funding ($10,000 per year) has necessitated that the infusion of literature be a rather slow process. Fortunately, the gradual adoption of tradebooks has proven highly effective. Sixty copies of each title are provided for grade levels K-3, and 120 copies of each title are provided for grade levels 4-6. The trade books are housed at and distributed from one central book distribution center. Books are checked out for a period of three weeks and are provided in class sets, one per student. This distribution process has been very effective due to the cooperation of the entire staff, who respect the "due dates" and return selections promptly.

Considerations/Problems

The use of multi-cultural literature and literature which provides for a variety of "genre" is often considered. Newberry and Caldecott award-winning materials have been chosen whenever possible, but some selections are not suitable for use as tradebook selections. When choosing a selection, it has been advantageous to use an evaluation guide which focuses on the following criteria:

- Does the book use clear, readable language?
- Is the level of vocabulary appropriate for the background of your students?
- Is the vocabulary density (i.e. percentage of difficult words) appropriate for your students?
- Does the text provide positive roll models for both sexes and for different ethnic or cultural groups?
- Does the overall content of the book reflect what you feel are worthwhile concepts?
- Is the content up-to-date and relevant to your students?
- Is there evidence of religious bias, racism or sexism?
- Is the content of interest to your students?
- Does the book lend itself to extension activities and thoughtful questioning? (Wis. D.P.I., 1989)

This year over 70 teachers reviewed potential selections. The selection process has involved as many staff as possible, and in doing so, has given a true sense of teacher "ownership" to the reading program.

Distribution and financial constraints remain the greatest challenges to the success of the tradebook program. The overwhelming acceptance of the novels and their frequent use necessitates thorough bookkeeping and management. A central distribution center has proven highly effective. Staff members make their requests and return selections to one person, who coordinates the program and sees that the books are delivered by school mail. This central distribution point routes books according to teacher request and title availability.

The limited funding provided for this project necessitates careful expenditures. Originally, books were purchased in paperback form. As the success of the program became apparent, hard cover copies were purchased whenever feasible.

Approximately $10,000 - $13,000 per year is allocated for the trade book component of the reading curriculum. Although limited funding remains the biggest problem, the success of the program has encouraged administrators to increase expenditures whenever possible.

A final consideration and concern has been the required use of mandated district testing. Presently, the California Achievement Test is given at all grade levels during the spring of the year, as is 3 grade competency testing. While a worthwhile measure in many respects, the tests do not reveal the subtle attitude changes, strategy knowledge, and comprehension monitoring development of many elementary students. These tests continue to be synthetic, contrived and confining (Goodman, 1989). Testing needs to become more consistent with the principles of whole-language, literature-based instruction if it is to appropriately reflect the reading/language arts growth of the students of the district.

The overwhelming success of the tradebook program within the West Allis-West Milwaukee School District is the result of several factors. Most noteably they are:

- on-going staff development
- "model" lessons provided by the reading/language arts specialist
- staff in-put at all levels during tradebook evaluation and selection
- enthusiasm for the program on the part of students, parents and administrators
- use of the basal reader component as a selective tool, rather than as the only mandated reading curriculum
- flexible grouping, interest grouping, and heterogenous instruction.
- gradual change and acceptance due to increased knowledge and awareness of the importance of quality children's literature, which allows children to read for meaningful purposes and real needs.

For further information, contact:

Winnie R. Huebsch, Ph.D.
School District of West Allis-West Milwaukee, et al.
9333 West Lincoln Avenue
West Allis, Wisconsin 53227

1-414-546-5504
FAX: 1-414-546-5780

DISTRICT TRADEBOOKS

Grade Level	Title	Author
Kindergarten	Dear Zoo	R. Campbell
	I Made A Mistake	Nerlove
	Alphabatics	MacDonald
	Cat on a Mat	B. Wildsmith
	The Very Hungry Caterpillar	E. Carle
Grade 1	Frog and Toad Are Friends	A. Lobel
	Corduroy	D. Freeman
	Whistle for Willie	E. Keats
	Jillian Jiggs	P. Gilman
	The Napping House	A. Wood
	King Bidgood's in the Bathtub	A. Wood
	If You Give a Mouse a Cookie	L. Numberoff
	It Looked Like Spilt Milk	C. G. Shaw
	There's a Nightmare in My Closet	M. Mayer
Grade 2	Where the Wild Things Are	M. Sendak
	Ira Sleeps Over	S. Waber
	Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel	V. Bierton
	Miss Nelson is Missing	H. Allard
	The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash	T. Nobb
	Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day	J. Viorst
	Henry and Mudge	C. Rylant
	Ant Cities	A. Dorros
	Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters	J. Steptoe
	Sylvester and the Magic Pebble	W. Stelg
Grade 3	Ramona Quimby, Age 8	B. Cleary
	Pippi Longstocking	A. Lindgren
	Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs	Barrett
	Chocolate Fever	R. Smith
	How to Eat Fried Worms	T. Rockwell
	The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses	P. Goble
	Sara, Plain and Tall	P. MacLachan
	Something Queer at the Library	E. Levy
	The Flunking of Joshua T. Bates	Shreve
	The Talking Eggs	R. D. San Souci

Grade 4	The Long Winter	L. Wilder
	Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing	J. Blume
	Charlotte's Web	E. B. White
	The Cricket in Times Square	G. Selden
	Stone Fox	K. Lawson
	Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes	E. Coerr
	The Whipping Boy	S. Fleischman
	The Hoboken Chicken Emergency	D. Pinkwater
	Owls in the Family	F. Mowat
	Caddie Woodlawn	C. Brink
Grade 5	Island of the Blue Dolphins	S. O'Dell
	Sign of the Beaver	E. Speare
	Indian in the Cupboard	L. Banks
	Ben and Me	K. Lawson
	Nothing's Fair in the Fifth Grade	B. De Clements
	A Taste of Blackberries	D. Smith
	The Summer of the Swans	B. Byars
	The Phantom Tollbooth	N. Juster
	Hatchet	G. Paulsen
	Phillip Hall Likes Me, I Reckon Maybe	B. Greene
	Lincoln: A Photobiography	R. Freedman
Grade 6	Bridge to Terabithia	K. Paterson
	Black Pearl	S. O'Dell
	Call it Courage	A. Sperry
	The Borrowers	N. Norton
	Danny, Champion of the World	R. Dahl
	House of Dies Drier	V. Hamilton
	The Great Brain	J. Fitzgerald
	Pinballs	B. Byers
	Number the Stars	L. Lowry
	Tuck Everlasting	N. Babbit

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Cook, D. M. (ed.). 1989. Strategic learning in the content areas. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: Madison, Wisconsin.

Cullinan, B. E. (ed.) 1987. Children's literature in the reading program. International Reading Association: Newark, Delaware.

Goodman, K., Goodman, Y., and Hood, W. (eds.) 1989. The whole language evaluation book. Heinemann Educational Book, Inc.: Portsmouth, N.H.

Kegan, S. and Shrake, K. (1991). Literature study groups: An alternative to ability grouping. *The Reading Teacher*. 44 (8), 542-547.

Routman, R. (1988). Transitions: From literature to literacy. Rigby: Melbourne, Australia.

TRADEBOOK EVALUATION GUIDE

Evaluator _____

Title of Book _____

Author _____

Publisher _____

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As you evaluate this book, consider students' background knowledge. You may want to ask students to help evaluate the book.

Using the following scale, evaluate how well the book meets the following criteria:

Inappropriate				Appropriate
1	2	3	4	5

Place the appropriate number below.

_____ Does the book use clear, readable language?

_____ Is the level of vocabulary appropriate for the background of your students?

_____ Is the vocabulary density (i.e. percentage of difficult words) appropriate for your students?

_____ Does the text provide positive roll models for both sexes and for different ethnic or cultural groups?

_____ Does the overall content of the book reflect what you feel are worthwhile concepts?

_____ Is the content up-to-date and relevant to your students?

_____ Is there evidence of religious bias, racism or sexism?

_____ Is the content of interest to your students?

_____ Does this book lend itself to extension activities and thoughtful questioning?

Source: Strategic Learning. (1989) Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Comments: _____

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Developed by Dr. Winnie Huebsch